DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 715 CE 082 332

TITLE	How To Start a Volunteer Literacy Program in Your Community.
INSTITUTION	Illinois State Office of the Secretary of State, Springfield.
PUB DATE	2001-10-00
NOTE	19p.; Produced by the Secretary of State Literacy Office.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/library/isl/literacy/vol_bookle t.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Adult Reading Programs; *Community Programs; Fund Raising; Governing Boards; *Literacy Education; *Nongovernmental Organizations; Partnerships in Education; *Program Development; Program Implementation; Reading Achievement; Reading Instruction; State Standards; *Voluntary Agencies; Volunteer Training; Volunteers
IDENTIFIERS	*Illinois

ABSTRACT

Prepared by the office of the Illinois Secretary of State and State Librarian, this manual describes the components and basic start-up steps of successful volunteer literacy programs. The 17 short sections provide an overview of the following topics: (1) purpose and mission; (2) determining need in your community; (3) recruiting students; (4) screening and testing students; (5) recruiting volunteers; (6) training volunteers; (7) designing an instructional program; (8) keeping records; (9) libraries and literacy; (10) cooperating with others in your community; (11) cooperating with other literacy agencies; (12) finance and budget; (13) staffing; (14) long-range planning, business plan; (15) program evaluation; (16) raising money; and (17) incorporation and board of directors. Three one-page appendixes provide information about adult basic education and English as a second language testing materials, literacy volunteer training guidelines, and 11 sources for learning materials. (KC)

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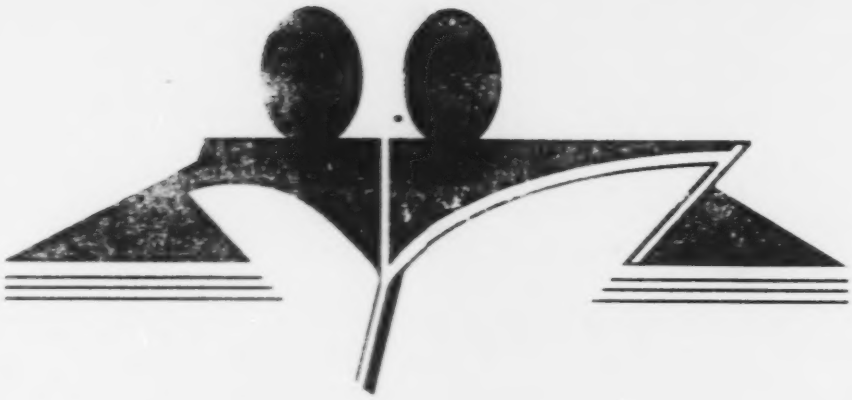

How to start a Volunteer Literacy Program in your community

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Secretary of State
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As Secretary of State and State Librarian, I am aware that many Illinois citizens who want to improve their reading, math, writing, and/or English as a Second Language skills are not being served. I also know that there are local groups and individuals who are interested in helping them learn those skills.

Many of those people and organizations have contacted my office wanting to know how to start a volunteer literacy program in their communities. My Literacy Office staff has developed this *How to Start a Volunteer Literacy Program* manual to address those requests. The manual describes the basic steps and components of successful volunteer literacy programs.

Once you have read the material, please contact my office in Springfield or Chicago for further assistance. Thank you for doing your part in providing literacy services to the people in your community.

Jesse White

JESSE WHITE
Secretary of State
and State Librarian

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1. Purpose and Mission

Existing Agency:

An adult literacy project can fit into a variety of agencies whose main work may include job training, social service, community development and youth education, among others. It can also be part of a church's mission of personal growth. It is advisable to review the mission and purpose of the organization before launching an adult literacy project. If adult literacy (or English as a Second Language) does not fit with the purpose of the agency, the project will have a difficult time being successful. An adult literacy project takes a great deal of commitment, personnel and resources. A literacy project should only be considered when there is a clear understanding of its place within the overall organization, and when it has the organization's full commitment.

New Agency:

Beginning a literacy project is a major undertaking. It requires a clear plan for its operation, support, instructional content and place in the community. However, if a group is determined to address a clear need in the community, this booklet will help. Joining forces with an existing agency may be more effective than beginning a project because many of the organizational elements are already in place. If funding is required for the project, the group will need to become incorporated as a not-for-profit organization and will need to establish a board of trustees. See Section 17 on becoming incorporated.

2. Determining Need in Your Community

Although it is apparent that literacy skills and skills in reading and speaking English are sorely needed by thousands of people, perhaps millions, in Illinois, determining the extent and character of the need in your community is of primary importance before you design a program. Statistics are available in local communities by census tracts. Local libraries have community statistics. Community colleges often have statistics on the community.

In addition to these sources, surveys of requests for literacy services, neighborhood studies, results of tests for program admittance, are all appropriate determinants of community need.

Although poverty, welfare and unemployment statistics may indicate the need for literacy programs, these conditions alone do not necessarily determine the need for a literacy program in the community. Similarly, the lack of a high school diploma does not always indicate a lack of reading skills, as a high school diploma does not guarantee that reading, math and other basic skills have been mastered.

Of particular assistance in designing a program is knowledge of what potential adult learners want to achieve. For example: read to their children, obtain a job, get a better job, obtain their GED, pass their citizenship test. These are indicators of need.

3. Recruiting Students

For a literacy project to be successful, a lively flow of student applicants is necessary. Although it may seem like potential students are not in short supply, recruiting those that your need study targeted will take vigilance and effort.

Following are ideas for sources of incoming students:

Department of Human Services
Community colleges
Other social service organizations
Community organizations
Local schools
Neighborhood events
Local churches

For each of these sources, have a brochure or flyer about your program that staff of these organizations can have in hand for referrals. Word the materials carefully to reflect your respect for and sensitivity to persons who have difficulty reading well. Using negative terms such as "illiterate" or "illiteracy" is not appropriate. For direct recruitment of potential students, a simple card with an announcement of free classes or free tutoring with the phone number can be effective. Be sure that the phone number listed is attended most of the time because callers will usually not make several attempts. Once a person works up the courage to make the call, they need to get through to a person.

4. Screening and Testing Students

Understandably, a project needs to focus on potential students who fit in the mission of the organization or who are particularly in need of basic skills. For this reason, many literacy projects focus their efforts on specific kinds of skills. (For example: to teach basic conversational English to recent immigrants; to teach basic math, reading and writing in preparation for employment; or to teach parents basic reading skills so they can work on a computer or read to their children.) Other organizations prepare people to take and pass the GED test.

If your organization wishes to receive Secretary of State funding for Adult Literacy, participants must fall below maximum skill ranges. These have been established to ensure that this grant program serves those persons most in need of service.

Participants must:

1. be adults over age 16 and no longer in school, and
2. have reading and/or math skills below the 9th grade level, or
3. have limited English proficiency.

There are a number of standardized tests which, when properly administered, will give an approximate level of vocabulary, reading or math skills. The Secretary of State's Literacy Office requires that all English-speaking reading students be tested using the Slosson Oral Reading Test-Revised (SORT-R). The program or project may give additional reading tests, but if Secretary of State funds support the program, the SORT-R must be reported as the pre-test and in subsequent post-tests.

If the program accepts math students, the test used is the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

For projects teaching English as a Second Language, a number of tests are acceptable, including the BEST, CELSA and NYSE. See Appendix A on page 12 for sources of sited tests.

5. Recruiting Volunteers

Recruiting volunteers is an art as well as a skill. Primary in developing this art and skill is respect for the generosity of the volunteer who gives their time, talent and energy. Secretary of State Community Literacy funding requires a strong volunteer component. The strength of your volunteer component will increase over time but must have a firm foundation.

Companies who contribute funds for the betterment of their communities often encourage employees to volunteer their time in the same effort. Some corporations value their employees' selection of worthy charities so much that they will contribute money only to those agencies for which their employees volunteer. Volunteer development and building your funding base often go hand in hand. As volunteers learn more about the needs of students and the solution that your agency has developed for meeting those needs, they become the spokespersons for your agency, often bringing in more volunteers and spreading the word to others.

Following are some sources of volunteers:

Local clubs and churches
Colleges
Businesses in the community
Employees of corporate donors
Retired Service Volunteer Project (RSVP)
Board members and their contacts
Friends and relatives
Residents of the neighborhood

This is not an exhaustive list. Be creative and politely persistent. As with recruiting students, have a brochure or flyer of information about your organization and its volunteer opportunities to distribute to potential volunteers. Standards for volunteers are a matter of policy development, usually in collaboration with your board. Having a job description will help volunteers understand their responsibilities. Selection of appropriate volunteers is based on the judgement of staff and the needs of clients.

6. Training Volunteers

Volunteers can only be expected to be as effective as their training and experience have prepared them to be. Even highly-educated volunteers expect and deserve proper training. The training should be rich in content, well-organized, thorough, and appropriate to the population that your agency serves. The training should prepare volunteers for their tutoring or teaching role with adults. Although further development opportunities may occur throughout the volunteer's service, initial pre-service training is of primary importance.

The Secretary of State's Literacy Office requires a minimum of 12 hours of pre-service training of volunteers. The content varies according to the needs of the agency and of the students. An outline of the core content is included in Appendix B on page 13.

Matching a volunteer to the right assignment is a skill and an art, especially in matching one volunteer tutor to one student. The successful match can produce remarkable results. If the pair is not happy, is frustrated or not showing up, the match is not working. In that case, a speedy re-assignment will provide both parties with a new opportunity for a successful match.

7. Designing an Instructional Program

The instructional program should be tailored to meet the needs of the learners. It is particularly important that the instruction and materials be geared to the adult population and be practical in application.

Selection of appropriate instructional materials will require a significant time commitment and will, like many aspects of the program, develop over time as the learners teach the staff what works best.

Communication with literacy colleagues is often a good place to begin for recommendations on instructional materials.

Appendix C on page 14 is a source listing for materials covering the full range of basic skills.

8. Keeping Records

For effective operation of a project, records of volunteers and students need to be maintained.

Applications: A basic application for students and one for volunteers will provide the information necessary for communication and matching volunteers with learners.

Attendance or instructional hours: A record of attendance of each student in class or tutoring session should be maintained. Time that a volunteer gives to your program also should be systematically tracked and reported. These include hours in which a volunteer instructs students as well as hours investing in their own training and skill development.

Pre- and post-tests: Copies of the tests should be kept in the student's file. Post-tests are at the discretion of the project but no less than twice annually.

9. Libraries and Literacy

Libraries and literacy programs have a common interest in maintaining a literate society. Libraries often are the point of entry for persons seeking literacy services. If the library does not offer these services directly, referrals are made to local literacy programs. Moreover, libraries are the sites of general and specific knowledge for the whole community. Cooperation between literacy programs and libraries is key to their mutual success. In Illinois, this cooperation is particularly encouraged by Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White.

10. Cooperating With Others in Your Community

In addition to libraries, other agencies and individuals in the neighborhood or community can be a source of referrals and support for your project. The Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois Employment Security office, local health departments, social service agencies, job training programs, employers, schools, churches, food pantries, senior clubs, Head Start projects and countless others will want to know about your literacy project. These community contacts are mutual support opportunities with referrals, donations, volunteers, equipment, students, speakers and knowledge being exchanged among colleagues. Strengthening relationships with other agencies in your community will also strengthen your literacy project.

11. Cooperating With Other Literacy Agencies

Literacy agencies are a community of providers with common concerns, interests and challenges. Cooperating and communicating with your literacy colleagues will bring valuable support and information to your project. Area coalitions exist throughout the state. In Chicago, the Hispanic Literacy Council and the coalitions for the South, West, North sides meet monthly. In other parts of Illinois, regional meetings are announced in the *Illinois Literacy* newsletter from the Secretary of State Literacy Office.

In addition to area and regional coalitions, groups often meet by type of provider, such as family literacy providers, workplace literacy providers, etc. These meetings are conducted and organized by the members to meet their particular needs. Agencies discuss topics of mutual interest, share schedules of events and often share procedures and solutions to problems.

12. Finance and Budget

Sound fiscal management is important no matter the size of your budget. As a not-for-profit agency, your financial statements are a matter of public record. Proper use of funds and grants is required by law. However, it is often the day-to-day procedures that can cause frustration, errors and impatience on the part of literacy practitioners. Finances are as important to the overall health of your agency as the instructional program. Fiscal procedures should be straightforward, as simple as possible and as thorough as necessary. Following them consistently will save you, your staff and the financial officer much unnecessary effort and tension.

Advice from other non-profit organizations is often helpful, and free advice is available from CPA's for the Public Interest (check your local telephone directory). Communicating well with the financial officer will contribute to mutual satisfaction. You will balance your agency's need for funds and the financial director's need for accuracy and timeliness.

Your budget is a projection of what you expect to spend in various categories for the upcoming fiscal year. Your fiscal year is either the calendar year—January 1- December 31—or, if you adhere to the school calendar and receive money from state agencies, you will probably have a fiscal year, such as July 1-June 30.

Your project's budget is larger than the funding you receive from any one source. But each grantor may want a separate accounting for the funds they have contributed. To determine if a separate accounting is necessary, determine if the funds are "restricted." If so, you must spend only in categories designated in the grant and for purposes outlined in your request for funding. Secretary of State funds are "restricted."

13. Staffing

Staffing needs are determined by the amount of work to be done and the skills necessary to do the work. The most common staffing pattern of a basic literacy project consists of a coordinator who is responsible for recruiting, training, testing, matching and providing instructional materials and focus. Support personnel often assist the coordinator with record-keeping and other clerical tasks.

If you apply for funding from the Secretary of State, a minimum of a bachelor's degree is required for a project director.

[illegible] Business Plan

When trying to meet the needs of persons needing literacy services, it is sometimes difficult to think far into the future. There are concerns that must be dealt with immediately. But it is also important to plan for the growth of your literacy project. The challenge of literacy will probably not be solved in a year or two, even with all the talented people we have working on this issue.

To assure that your project will be there to meet the needs of your community three, five and even 10 years in the future, long-range planning is necessary. Every agency and Board of Trustees will approach this in a different manner. What is important is that the leadership engage in planned growth based on a clear vision of the mission of the organization, including increased services, funding and staffing.

A business plan can be short- or long-term. It outlines how the organization is going to accomplish its goals. It includes an outline of how the functions and jobs relate to one another (staffing plan), what the resources are that will be applied to each function (budget) and what methods will be employed to meet the needs of clients (instructional program).

15. Program Evaluation

An evaluation of the effectiveness of your project is required to assess the overall health of your program. The identification of strengths and weaknesses will enable your organization to adjust its business and long-range plans. Program development based on evaluation is an integral part of the growth of the organization.

You may use evaluation to assess whether you are making a difference by doing this work. If you discover weaknesses in your project, you can correct them. If you discover successes, you can celebrate them with the students, staff and volunteers.

Evaluation can be used to adjust goals and to develop specific outcomes. Outcomes are the measurable changes in skills and behavior that the students in your project achieve. These changes can occur because of the services your organization offers. Skills can be developed. Lives can be changed.

16. Raising Money

Like long-range planning, raising monetary support for your organization does not happen without leadership and direction. This aspect of your business is often called fund development. This development or growth has two aspects: longevity and persistence. Development happens over time — a long time, often years and years. It is never finished.

Many agencies have a professional staff to organize fund development. This is not always necessary or possible in small organizations, but committed and articulate people can be very effective in raising support for your organization. These could be board members, volunteers or members of the staff.

Approach prospective donors with respect. Have confidence that your project is worth supporting. Have some basic materials prepared— a brochure, project budget, goals, outline of achievements and a list of current supporters.

Begin with donors who are your neighbors and who have an interest in your agency. This may include local businesses, local foundations and individuals. Large national foundations and businesses, unless they have a particular interest in your community and in literacy, will be more difficult to access.

17. Incorporation, Board of Directors

The Secretary of State Department of Business Services produces a booklet titled, *A Guide For Organizing Not-For-Profit Corporations.* A copy may be ordered through the Secretary of State Web site at http://199.15.3.179/cgi-bin/puborder.s. Refer to this booklet for rules and procedures governing non-profit organizations. Charitable organizations must also register with the State and report to the Attorney General's Charitable Trust Division annually. All not-for-profit corporations need a minimum of three persons serving on a board of directors or board of trustees. The board has fiscal and legal responsibilities for the organization.

18. Appendix A

Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language Testing Materials

Title	Source
Adult Basic Education	
Slosson Oral Reading Test-Revised (SORT-R)	Slosson Educational Publications, Inc. P.O. Box 280 East Aurora, NY 14052-0280 1-800-828-4800
Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE)	CTB/McGraw Hill 20 Ryan Ranch Rd. Monterey, CA 93940
English as a Second Language	
BEST (Basic English Skills Test)	Center for Applied Linguistics 1118-22nd St., NW Washington, DC 20037
CELSA (Comprehensive English Language Skills Assessment)	Assn of Classroom Teacher Testers 1136 Clement St. San Francisco, CA 94118
ESLOA (English as a Second Language Oral Assessment)	Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. 5795 Widewater Pkwy. Syracuse, NY 13214
NYS-Place Test	University of the State of New York State Education Department Division for Program Development Albany, NY 12234

19. Appendix B

Literacy Volunteer Training Guidelines

The ultimate success of the Illinois Literacy Volunteer effort rests with the effectiveness of volunteer training. Training must be of high quality, systematic and ongoing. It must prepare volunteer tutors to meet the reading, math, writing or English-language learning needs of the adult learners who have enrolled in the program. Specific strategies, methods, techniques and training delivery methods (lecture and home-study, observation, mentoring or shadowing) should be de-veloped by local coordinators and trainers to fit the **specific** needs of their learners and tutors.

Adult education professionals recommend that initial (pre-service) volunteer-tutor training be a **MINIMUM OF 12 HOURS in length and that at least the following eight topics be included:**

TOPIC #1: Introduction to the problem of illiteracy and orientation to the literacy efforts at the local, state and national levels.

TOPIC #2: The adult literacy volunteer — expectations, rights, responsibilities and roles within the local program's administrative structure.

TOPIC #3: The adult learner — needs, goals, uniqueness; methods to establish rapport; initial goal-setting: self-esteem builders; spotting learning barriers.

TOPIC #4: The adult language learner — the language acquisition process and the reading process (definition of reading/comprehension).

TOPIC #5: Assessment techniques — informal ways to detect possible hearing, vision and learning difficulties; introduction to assessment tool(s) and other methods of evaluating student progress.

TOPIC #6: Instructional techniques for adult literacy learners at beginning, middle and advanced levels as appropriate. These include: vocabulary/word analysis, comprehension and writing skills for native English speakers. For second language learners, instruction should include listening, comprehension, speaking, reading and writing skills. If desired, techniques for teaching/tutoring basic math students or tips for using computer-assisted instruction may be included as well.

TOPIC #7: Materials/Resources/Support — overview of commercial materials available to tutors for loan or on-site; tips on preparation of "real world" materials or use of newspapers, bus schedules and the like; orientation to continuing education opportunities and support services provided by the project or its partners and cooperating agencies.

TOPIC #8: Goal setting and lesson plans — organizing instruction to meet individual needs.

Regular in-service professional development opportunities may include the following: family learning strategies and parent-child activities to share with adult students; workplace literacy adaptations; life-skills useful to adult learners; advanced testing; study skills; counseling techniques; retention strategies; problem solving; and advanced writing strategies.

20. Appendix C

Sources for Learning Materials

Contemporary Books
4255 W. Touhy
Lincolnwood, IL 60646-1975
312-621-1918

Curriculum Associates, Inc.
5 Esquire Rd.
North Billerica, MA 01862
1-800-225-0248

Delta Book Distributors
1-800-323-8270

Harcourt Steck-Vaughn
P.O. Box 26015
Austin, TX 78755
1-800-531-5015

New Readers Press
1320 Jamesville Ave.
Syracuse, NY 13210
1-800-448-8878

Oxford University Press
2001 Evans Rd.
Cary, NC 27513
1-800-451-7556

Pearson Education
(formerly Addison Wesley,
Scott Foresman & Globe Fearon)
200 Old Tappan Rd.
Old Tappan, NJ 07675
1-800-375-2375

Redmedia Publications
10135 E. Via Linda, #D124
Scottsdale, AZ 85258
1-800-826-4740

Sunburst Communications
(software & video only)
1-800-321-7511

Training and Materials

Adult Learning Resource Center
1855 Mt. Prospect Rd.
Des Plaines, IL 60018
847-803-3535
FAX 847-803-3231

Literacy Volunteers of America-Illinois
33 E. Adams St., #1103
Chicago, IL 60603
312-857-1582
FAX 312-857-1586

www.cyberdriveillinois.com

Printed by authority of the State of Illinois - October 2001 – 1M – GA-289 – LDL-12
Text printed on recycled paper

For more information and assistance, contact:

Secretary of State Literacy Office
100 W. Randolph, Suite 5-400
Chicago, Illinois 60601
(312) 814-4739

OR

Secretary of State Literacy Office
431 S. Fourth St.
Springfield, Illinois 62701
1-800-665-5576, #1, #3
or (217) 785-6921

For referral of students and volunteers
to literacy programs, contact:

ILLINOIS ADULT LEARNING HOTLINE
1-800-321-9511

For more information, check out the
Literacy Office Web site at
www.cyberdriveillinois.com/library/isl/literacy/lit_main.html